

# *SEN. BOB MCCASLIN*

## *CAPITOL TIDBITS*

The 2006 session of the Washington State Legislature began at noon on January 9. The regular 60-day session is scheduled to end on March 9.

In order to keep the session moving along in an orderly fashion, legislators adopt deadlines for their work. Here are the significant cutoffs:

- ☑ Feb. 3: Last day for the House and Senate standing committees to act on their own bills, except those necessary to implement budgets.
- ☑ Feb. 7: Last day for the House and Senate fiscal committees to act on their own bills necessary to implement the budgets.
- ☑ Feb. 14: Last day for the House and Senate to vote on their own bills, except those necessary to implement the budgets.
- ☑ Feb. 24: Last day for the House and Senate standing committees to act on bills from the opposite chamber.
- ☑ Feb. 27: Last day for the House and Senate fiscal committees to act on matters from the opposite chamber that are necessary to implement the budgets
- ☑ March 3: Last day for the House and Senate to vote on bills from the opposite chamber, except those necessary to implement the budgets and bills in dispute between the chambers.

Here are some highlights from the first week:

### **Emergency energy assistance bill moves quickly to a vote**

Early last fall, Senate Republicans pushed for a special session because of the skyrocketing cost of home heating fuels. We wanted to cap the utility tax so that people wouldn't be burdened with higher taxes on higher fuel prices. We wanted to provide more funding for the low-income home heating assistance program so families and the elderly could afford to keep their homes warm during the coming winter months. Unfortunately, we could not convince the majority Democrats or the governor to move that fast. However, on the third day of session, Jan. 11, the House and Senate both unanimously approved more funding for the energy assistance program. We have been assured that this money will quickly become available to heat the homes of several thousand more low-income Washington citizens.

### **Protecting our children from sexual predators**

House and Senate Republicans and Republican Attorney General Rob McKenna have targeted several changes to the state's sexual predator laws that will better protect our

children and make sure those who commit these heinous crimes are harshly punished. Proposed changes include 25-year mandatory sentences to life in prison for lewd and lascivious molestation of a child; mandatory lifetime supervision of offenders released from prison; increased use of electronic monitoring; and making sexual predators who murder their victims eligible for the death penalty. Many of the proposed changes are part of Florida's Jessica's Law, which is named for Jessica Marie Lunsford, a 9-year-old girl who was abducted, sexually assaulted and murdered on Feb. 23, 2005, by a previously convicted sex offender who was in violation of his probation and had failed to register his change of address with local law enforcement.

Closer to Washington state, we faced our own sad story when convicted child rapist Joseph Duncan allegedly killed several members of an Idaho family in order to sexually assault their two young children.

### **Protecting property owners from government takings**

The Washington State Constitution specifically forbids government entities from taking private property for another private use. Unfortunately, the Washington State Supreme Court issued a decision on the Pioneer Square Monorail station that allowed privately owned land to be taken on a flimsy and abusive construction of "public use." In the dissent on the Monorail decision, Justice Richard Sanders wrote: "Municipal corporations do not possess an inherent power of eminent domain and thus may exercise such power only when expressly authorized to do so by the state legislature." A measure before the Legislature contains very specific language as to what constitutes public use and declares: "No government shall take or damage private land or any interest in real property that is not to be used for the construction of a public use facility or the provision of a public service necessary to protect public health and safety."

As we move through this 60 day session, I'll continue to keep you informed.

Senator Bob McCaslin  
P.O. Box 40404  
Olympia, WA 98504-0404  
(360) 786-7606